| ERIC Document Resume | See Instruction Sheet | DATE OF RESUME 8/19/65 | DATE RECEIVED |
|---|---|---|---|

A. PUBLICATION DATA

| 1. ERIC NUMBER | 2. ORIGINATOR CONTROL NO(S). | 3. IDENTIFICATION NO. | DO NOT WRITE IN SPACE BELOW |
|---|---|---|---|
| ED000634 | R2 p.3 | | |

4. AUTHOR(S): Pettengill, T. E.

5. TITLE OF DOCUMENT ABSTRACTED: Brief History of American University Calendars, Excerpts from the Report of the University Calendar Study Committee of the University of Michigan.

6. PUBLICATION TITLE: N.A.

7. EDITOR(S): N.A.

8. PLACE OF ORIGIN: ORG. University of Michigan; ST. ; CITY, STATE Ann Arbor, Michigan; TELE. EXT. ; INST/LOC CODE

9. PUBLISHER OR SOURCE: University of Michigan

| 10. VOL. | 11. PAGES | 12. MO./YR. | 13. TOTAL PP. |
|---|---|---|---|
| N.A. | N.A. | 58 | |

MICROFILM COPY AVAILABLE: YES ☒ NO ☐

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TYPE OF REPORT: PROPOSAL ☐ IN-PROGRESS ☐ FINAL ☒ FOLLOW-UP ☐

OTHER ERIC REFERENCES:

ERIC SATELLITE CODE

B. INDEXING DATA

| 14. SUBJECT AREA | 15. TYPE OF ENDEAVOR |
|---|---|
| | |

16. INDEXING TERMS (6-12)

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Universities | | | |
| school year | | | | |
| administration | | | | |

17. ABSTRACT (MAX. 250 WORDS)

Brief history of American university calendars; review of previous studies on semester vs. quarter system; and on possible year round operation; discussion of possible year round operation at Michigan with reasons for present rejection; analysis of five alternate systems.

ERIC No.

18. SOURCE OF ABSTRACT

C. FUNDING DATA

| 19. SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION | 20. DIVISION OR DEPT. | 21. CONTRACT NO. / PROJECT NO. |
|---|---|---|
| | 22. TOTAL COST OF PROJECT | |
| | 23. DURATION OR PROJECT | U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Office of Education |

ERIC Form 1

# Excerpts from the Report of the University Calendar Study Committee of the University of Michigan, June 19, 1958

## BRIEF HISTORY OF AMERICAN UNIVERSITY CALENDARS

Harvard University operated for nearly two centuries (1638-1801) on the four-term system. These terms were unequal in length and separated by rather lengthy vacations of unequal length. The three-term system was popular during the latter part of the last century. The three terms were unequal in length, being separated by long and short vacations. Since a large number of students in the American colleges spent most of the winter months teaching school--because the children in the schools were needed on the farm during the spring, summer, and autumn months--the college calendar allowed a long vacation during the winter months for its students to teach. Harvard operated on three terms from 1801 to 1839. The College of William and Mary operated on three terms until 1888, Yale University until 1876, Princeton University until 1889, Dartmouth College until 1898, the University of Wisconsin until 1895, the University of Illinois until 1899. The University of Michigan operated on a three-term system from the beginning of its instruction until 1856.

In 1856 the University of Michigan shifted from a three-term plan to the semester plan, this being the first time that the word "semester" is known to have been used as a measurement of length of instruction in colleges in this country. From Michigan the semester plan spread, until today it is the most characteristic scheme of calendar organization used in the United States.

Three factors seem to have contributed to the adoption of the two-term or semester system:

1. The decline of students teaching during the winter months in the rural schools;
2. The desire to equalize the lengths of the terms;
3. The influence of German educational thought and procedures.

It seems to be universally agreed that the quarter system, as we know it today, originated at the University of Chicago in 1892, as Chicago attempted to operate its institution all year and to make the summer quarter an integral part of the year's work. Some institutions followed the lead of the University of Chicago and adopted the quarter system.

Perhaps World War I had more influence in this connection than any other factor. In 1917 the Council of National Defense called representatives of some two hundred colleges to Washington, wishing to lay plans for utilization of the plants and equipment of colleges in the training of officers. This group recommended that all colleges and universities should modify their programs to utilize most profitably the time of students and their institutional plant and equipment, and should consider the advisability of dividing the year into four quarters of approximately twelve weeks each. As a result of this conference, a large number of colleges transferred to the quarter plan. Some have remained on a quarter plan since that time. The majority returned to the semester plan at the end of the War.

The socalled "trimester" plan came into use during World War II in connection with some of the military programs. It consisted of essentially year round operation with three "trimesters" of 16 weeks each. The term "trimester" is now quite universally used to describe the term in a system of year round operation using three terms. It is so used in this report.

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## REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

The problem of the length of the school term is ever present with American collegiate educators since, unfortunately, no one system appears to possess all of the virtues. Consequently, the question of quarter versus semester is one which has been studied by many institutions. In general, these studies led to no change in which system the institution was using.

Very recently the question of possible year round operation has led to studies in which the quarter system is compared with a trimester system. Though replies

indicate some general interest in a possible trimester system, it appears that most schools believe that the pressure is not currently strong enough to demand action now. Institutions on the quarter system, can announce year round operation, with minor adjustments for the other quarters, by providing for larger enrollment than previously for the summer quarter. Undoubtedly, in most schools, which may eventually adopt full year operation, the increase in enrollment in the summer term or summer quarter will be somewhat gradual. The institutions now on the semester system must make a more drastic revision of the present calendar to provide for a full term in the summer than will be required of the schools on the quarter system.

THE SEMESTER SYSTEM VERSUS THE QUARTER SYSTEM IN GROUPS OF AMERICAN COLLEGES

Many studies have been made throughout the years by many different institutions dealing with the advantages and disadvantages of the quarter and semester system. The arguments in these studies are very similar and it does not seem appropriate to make an exhaustive list of these studies.

Perhaps the most comprehensive investigation of the relative merits of the quarter and semester systems was that made by Ohio State University in 1932. While most of the faculty and students who were questioned at Ohio State were of the opinion that the quarter system would be far more acceptable in Ohio State University than the semester plan, the evidence presented is inconclusive. Support based on the opinions of undergraduate students is always open to criticism, as undergraduates are suspected of favoring the plan being used at their institution.

Two outstanding arguments regarding the quality of instruction under the quarter plan are mentioned:

1. Christmas vacation is said to interfere with the last portion of the semester's work. The quarter plan eliminates this difficulty by having final examinations just before the Christmas holidays.
2. The quarter plan theoretically requires students to take four and five hour courses rather than courses for one, two, and three hours. This is said to be particularly desirable from an educational standpoint for freshmen and sophomores.

The facts submitted, however, by Stanford University and Ohio State University, representing institutions operating on a quarter plan, indicate that there has been little, if any reduction in the number of courses taken by the students or, conversely, in changing elections of students to courses giving more hours credit.

Other conclusions of the report are also open to question. It is stated, with reference to the effectiveness of examinations, that term examinations are much more effective than semester examinations, because (1) they come more often; (2) they are two hours in length rather than four hours, (as semester examinations are alleged to be). There is no reason why institutions operating on the semester plan could not encourage their faculty to give two or three heavy examinations during the course of the semester. They could also set a final examination time that would not require four hours.

It is said that under the quarter plan a student can enter college at any quarter, and continue his progress toward his undergraduate degree, which will be granted after twelve quarters of residence. The comments of Stanford and Ohio State are again illuminating in this connection. It is pointed out that only a small number of freshman will enter at times other than the opening of the fall period, unless the high schools of the state operate on the quarter rather than the semester plan. Both institutions report that it is impossible to teach each course in the university each quarter, and that for students who enter at irregular quarters--other than the opening of the fall period--it is extremely difficult and virtually impossible to offer educationally sound programs, making actual progress toward achieving the student's educational goal, until the next fall period when he can be regularized. This difficulty is heightened by the fact that considerable effort is made to offer as many courses as possible in the summer quarter. This makes it necessary for many men

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to take their vacation during other quarters of the year, and consequently reduces the course offerings for these quarters.

The Illinois investigation of the merits and demerits of the two plans concludes that institutions on one plan should shift to another plan of calendar administration only for reasons of educational significance. The Illinois committee failed to find any reasons that would suggest shifting from one plan to another at Illinois.

The West Texas State Teachers College investigation came to the conclusion that most schools operate on a particular plan simply because they had been on that plan for a number of years and did not want to change.

The Wisconsin investigation was begun with the feeling on the part of many people that the quarter system offered so many advantages that the University should shift, as soon as practicable, to this program. As the investigation proceeded, however, it became more and more apparent to the committee that the educational disadvantages of such a shift might more than offset the advantages. Consequently Wisconsin continues to operate on the semester plan.

The general advice received from institutions now operating on the quarter plan (such as Minnesota, Stanford, Ohio State University) is to continue on the plan now being used, to examine some of the details of this plan, and to make such shifts in teaching methods as seem to be needed, but that the shift of an institution from the semester to the quarter plan would not justify the tremendous expense of trouble and educational confusion caused.

POSSIBLE YEAR ROUND OPERATION

The number of large universities which have taken extensive steps to study the problem of year round operation is fairly small. Universities on the quarter system appear to be in a better technical position with respect to year round operation than do the universities on the semester system, since there are approximately the number of weeks needed to make a summer quarter between the spring quarter and the fall quarter while there are not enough weeks, for those institutions on the semester system, to schedule a semester between the spring and fall semesters. As a result any institution, on the semester system, as it anticipates year round operation, must consider as possibilities (a) some hybrid system with terms of appreciably different length, (b) the rearrangement of its terms so as to make possible a third term in the summer, or (c) the adoption of the quarter system for the whole year. There are several variations of each of these since the quarter system, trimester system or even the hybrid system, can begin at different dates and can utilize different organization of course work within fixed time limits.

One effect is the reopen the question of semester system versus quarter system which has been studied by many schools and which has been decided, presumably permanently by many others as long as the choice is between three quarters or two semesters. However in considering effective year round operation the choice is a different one, four quarters versus three trimesters, and it is possible that an institution will choose the quarter system, or the trimester system, when planning for full year operation when it would make a different choice under present conditions. The emphasis in the following discussion is on year round operation because often the arguments of quarter versus semester, which have been featured in so many studies, need new weightings in making decisions for the future. Our deliberations led us to the conclusion that we should concentrate on those studies in which a comparison is made of the three months term with the four months term, <u>as a unit in year round operation under the conditions which will be prevalent during the next decade</u>.

The University of Massachusetts, Wayne State University, the University of Pittsburgh, the Pennsylvania State University, and the University of California have prepared special reports, (or have had special meetings) within the past year on the question of possible year round operation.

At the University of Massachusetts, the report recommended a quarter system with the terms beginning in November, February, May and August. However the Univer-

sity Senate disapproved of this plan at its meeting in March and consideration is now being given to a trimester system. Provost Shannon McCune indicates that they have an interim arrangement for the summer of 1959 and that the Committee will report this fall on a plan which keeps the semester pattern. He writes, "Our present inclination is to go onto a trimester pattern, wiping out the June Commencement and having instead Alumni reunion festivities with convocation speakers and perhaps honorary degrees... We are putting into effect an advance orientation program this summer." Certainly those interested in year round operation will wish to keep informed of developments at the University of Massachusetts.

At Wayne State University a report was presented in early January favoring the trimester system. The Wayne proposal features three trimesters of 15 weeks each. The Wayne Committee met the difficult issue of arrangements for faculty and research salaries by making a specific proposal. The Committee proposed that a 12 month contract year be adopted for all full time faculty members and that the individual faculty member be required to teach only three of each four terms. During this fourth term he would be assigned to "scholarly and creative activities" but would not be available for remunerative work elsewhere unless he obtained an approved leave without pay. The salary for the 12 month year would be obtained by multiplying the current 10 months salary by 12/10. The Wayne Committee also proposed the discontinuance of the sabbatical leave subject to the right to accumulate two, or even three, terms with no teaching duties.

Some specific features of the Wayne Plan met with the opposition of some faculty members who did not wish to be employed by the University on a 12-month basis. Though the adoption of a trimester system has not yet been approved at Wayne, the President has been authorized to make changes in the calendar looking toward the compression of the academic activity of a semester in a smaller length of time. The Committee is continuing in its task of attempting to work out a trimester system which will be acceptable.

At the University of Pittsburgh, a brochure proposing the adoption of a trimester calendar, prepared by the Committee on a Trimester Calendar, was presented in December, 1957. The proposal calls for three 15 week terms, with one term completed before Christmas, with a break of at least a week between each term and a break of about 4 weeks in the late summer. As far as remuneration for teaching and research is concerned, the Plan is more flexible than the Wayne Plan for it provides for "9-months" teaching appointments, for "12-months" teaching appointments, and for "12 months" teaching and research appointments. Those on a "9-months" teaching appointment teach two terms and will receive pay equivalent to that of the present academic year. Those on a "12-months" teaching appointment will recive a 1/3 increase. The third group, now on a "12-months" appointment, will be paid as at present.

Professor Putnam F. Jones, Chairman of the Pittsburgh Committee on the Trimester Calendar, wrote on May 19, 1958

"Our committee finished its study and made a report to Chancellor Litchfield on April 2. On April 28 an official University decision was reached to adopt a trimester calendar. The change will not be made, however, until we have given ourselves time to do the careful planning and preparation that will be necessary. We shall not attempt to introduce the calendar in September, 1958. Though no specific date for implementation has been mentioned, September 1959, would seem very likely."

The results at Pittsburgh should be watched closely by all who believe that a trimester plan may provide a partial answer to the enrollment problems ahead. As far as we are aware, Pittsburgh is the only large institution which is presently committed to the trimester system.

The Pennsylvania State University held a Senate Meeting in December 1957 at which consideration was given to several possible alternative plans of year round operation. One of the alternatives was a trimester term of not more than 16 weeks. We have not heard that Pennsylvania State has taken definite action as yet.

A Committee of the University of California (representing all Campuses) has given consideration this March to possible year round operation. The report has many interesting features. The question of admission of new students at various branches of the University at mid-years and the question of time necessary to take academic action on grades between semesters seem to be given high priority. In any case, a recommendation of this Committee is that the University of California operate for the next few years on a 2½ term year where the half term is to replace the present summer session. (This half term is to be treated, in all respects, as a real half term).

POSSIBLE YEAR ROUND OPERATION AT MICHIGAN

It is the opinion of the Committee that the prospective enrollments in the 1960's are such that the University must face the question of possible year round operation. To be sure the adoption of a more selective admissions policy might postpone the need for full year operation for some time. However, such a policy, to be effective in limiting enrollments, should result from action more quickly than one can expect from academic processes conducted in the usual leisurely fashion. Besides there is some question that Michigan, as a state supported institution, should rely on a selective process and should deny the use of its facilities, even though its operation on a year round basis may be necessary, to students who have qualifications equivalent to those of present student groups. The various groups (students, faculty, and administration) must face the question of possible year round operation at Michigan at some date in the not too distant future.

The Committee attempted to face this question but it came to the conclusion that the facts are not yet available and the decisions are not yet made which warrant any definite proposal for year round operation at this time. In particular, even though the estimates are impressive, there is no positive evidence that large groups of students will be demanding summer instruction in the early 1960's. It is the opinion of the Committee that any attempt to coerce students to attend college in some particular term (such as the summer term) is not appropriate for Michigan. But when and if conditions become such that thousands of qualified students wish to enroll for a full summer term (be it semester or quarter), Michigan should be in a position to provide the instruction. This remark should be qualified, of course, by the fact that any such policy of year round operation should be approved by the Regents and supported by the legislative branch of the state government.

It does not appear to us that these demands for extensive summer instruction exist now (as shown by the enrollments of the recent summer sessions) nor that they will exist in the next few years. Michigan is, in one sense, in a desirable position in that, due to the presence of large enrollments in the graduate and professional schools and due to extensive transfers from other institutions after the sophomore year, the percentage of freshman and sophomore enrollments is relatively low. Hence it appears that the impact of the annual increasing number of freshmen will be somewhat smaller than at sister institutions with larger numbers of undergraduates. Eventually the demand will presumably be felt in all the programs of the University but it does appear that we will have a little time in which to make our plans. We have proposed that a review of the whole situation be scheduled for 1961 and it is possible that the situation at that time may warrant a decision for year round operation. If so the academic discussion, which many consider essential before a drastic change is made, should take place before this date.

In response to the Preliminary Report, the Committee received a communication from the Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, and another from the Curriculum Committee of that College, indicating that several basic questions of educational policy are involved in calendars under discussion and that changes should be made deliberately and only after careful consideration. This advise, as well as the many questions about year round operation at Michigan, which apparently cannot be completely answered at this time, led us to the conclusion that we should not propose year round operation as of any date (or even the plan for

completing a semester before Christmas) as a definite recommendation of this report. The recommendations we do make are designed to make better use of our time irrespective of whether we operate on a two semester, a three semester, or a four quarter basis. Though the practices they imply seem to be prerequisites to effective year round operation, the recommendations are made primarily with the two semester system in mind. We are confident that the community generally will prefer this arrangement over the calendar for 1959-60 after the new techniques have been tried and perfected.

It is our opinion that faculty members generally react negatively to any proposal for year round operation though communications were received from Deans, from Department Chairmen, and from individual faculty members advocating some forms of it. Many of us remember with dismay the year round operation in the service programs during World War II and hope we will never have to participate in anything like that again! Several faculty members have sent communications indicating their distaste for year round operation.

The Committee agrees that year round operation must not imply year round teaching or even year round attendance. It is the opinion of the Committee that the primary objective of possible year round operation should be the full utilization of the physical facilities of the University and not generally the utilization of the same staff, for teaching, throughout the year. Probably the typical undergraduate student, too, should not be and would not be in continuous attendance though perhaps continuous attendance would be wise for many graduate students.

In its early study, the Committee attempted to work on specific arrangements for salaries and teaching arrangements under a possible trimester system. As the work of the Committee proceeded and it became apparent that necessary conditions for such definite recommendations are not presently satisfied, the Committee felt free of any possible obligation for specific proposals in this respect. In this connection the proposals at Pittsburgh, now adopted, might serve as a basis of discussion for salary and research arrangements in a trimester system.

The Committee is convinced from its discussion with administrative officials of the University, that in general the individual faculty member would not be subjected to a personal disadvantage as a result of a possible change to year round operation. Of course there would be many problems, but the Committee was assured that if at some future date the University adopts year round operation, faculty contracts will be worked out so that, generally, the professional position of the individual faculty member will not deteriorate. This means that the amount of teaching per year should not generally be increased and the time available for research per year should not generally be decreased. Also, the adjusted salary position, though perhaps different, should not be generally inferior, because of the adjustments to year round operation, to the present one.

In the Preliminary Report, the Committee gave considerable emphasis to the trimester system. This was done because the Committee was convinced that the majority of the faculty favored a three term year to a four term year <u>if it becomes necessary to adopt full year operation</u>, though there is strong support on campus for the quarter system. As the work of the Committee progressed, it became evident since firm information about enrollments and the solution of many specific problems of administration and education policy are not currently available, that the Committee should not make recommendations for any specific plan of year round operation at this time. Rather it should present the general features of possible alternative plans and ask the community to consider them.

Analysis by the number of terms per year leads to a consideration of the plans below. It is understood that suitable arrangements would be made for conventional holidays and for some vacations.

1. The term would consist of a full calendar year with a single registration and a single final examination period per year.

2. The term would consist of six months, a real semester. There would be two registration periods and two periods for final examinations per year.

3. The term would consist of four months, a proposed trimester. There would be three registration periods and three final examination periods per year. The length of this term, once vacations and holidays were accounted for, would correspond most nearly to the length of our present semester.

4. The term would consist of three months, a quarter. There would be four registration periods and four final examination periods per year. The length of this term would correspond to the length of the term of schools on the quarter system (not always as long as 12 weeks).

5. Some hybrid system in which terms of unequal length are utilized. In a sense we are operating on a hybrid system now since the 6 weeks and 8 weeks of the Summer Session certainly do not constitute full semesters.

Plan 1, which corresponds in a sense to practices in Canadian colleges, might be desirable for some graduate students but it hardly seems suited to the practices of faculty and students at Michigan. As indicated above it does not seem educationally desirable that either faculty or students should have academic assignments during the whole year.

Plan 2, also, was not seriously considered by the Committee (though the time devoted to registration and examinations has an appealing feature) since the full 6-month period appears too long for organization of many courses and for plans for academic activity. In particular it does not make possible the more detailed differentiation of activity according to the seasons which is essential in the work of many of the departments.

Plan 3 has a general appeal to those who work with records because it limits to three the number of times for registration, processing of grades, etc. It, as compared with the 4 term year, also is preferred by many faculty members who believe that the short term of 12 weeks or less is not an adequate time for maturation in many courses. But the three term year cannot be made to coincide with the seasons, though one of the terms may be made to coincide approximately with one of them. There is then a question of the scheduling of the three terms. Most educators who have considered a trimester system believe that the completion of one of the terms before Christmas is preferred. This necessarily interferes with the leisurely approach during this term but there is the advantage, very desirable for several purposes, that all work of the term be completed before Christmas. However there is then little choice in the scheduling of the other two terms and they may begin at times which may not be most desirable.

6. The quarter system also might begin at alternative times but the one in most common use is the one in which the quarters correspond to the seasons. Terms so scheduled have obvious advantages, for certain academic fields as well as for athletics, which are difficult to duplicate in any other system.

But the quarter system for year round operation does call for 4 registration periods, 4 examination periods, and 4 periods for processing grades per year. More serious is the objection of many faculty members at Michigan that the term is too short for the learning process.

The Committee wishes to point out again that the old argument of quarter versus semester takes on new meaning when year round operation is envisaged. The individual advantages and disadvantages of each system remain about the same, but the weightings are different since the ration of number of terms per year is now 4 to 3 rather than 3 to 2.

Each system has advantages and disadvantages and there appears to be no system in which the advantages of both can be combined. Many experienced admin-

istrators have come to the conclusion that the advantages of each system are so nearly balanced that it is hardly wise for any institution to get involved in the many details which are necessary for a change, even though it might have some preference for the other system.

7. Hybrid systems are distinct possibilities, particularly during the period of the next few years when the enrollment problem is not most serious. It would be possible to schedule a summer term of about 12 weeks during June, July, and August without making drastic changes in the term schedules. It does appear that such a term might start a bit early for many new high school graduates, but it would provide for summer instruction more adequately than does our summer session for those students wishing a more extensive instruction period during the summer.

In any case, serious consideration should be given to the implications of these alternative plans of possible year round operation so that, <u>if and when the administration considers that a decision is necessary and if there is suitable information on which such a decision can be based</u>, the academic community will be in a position to make a recommendation.

Reported by:
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2-4-59